Transfer of POK to Pakistan

480. SHRI SATISH PRADHAN: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are aware of the reported statement made by Mr. Farooq Abdullah, Chief Minister of Jammu & Kashmir regarding transfer of Pak Occupied Kashmir (POK) to Pakistan;

(b) if so, the reaction of Government thereto; and

(c) the details of action taken in this regard and the official stand thereon?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI I.K. GUJRAL): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) and (c) The entire State of Jammu & Kashmir is an integral part of the Indian Union. The issue which remains to be resolved is the vacation of that territory of the State of J&K which is under Pakistan's illegal and forcible occupation. India is committed to the resolution of all India-Pakistan issues in accordance with the Simla Agreement.

Recruitment of Handicapped Children to beg in Mecca and Medina

481. SHRI GURUDAS DAS GUPTA:
SHRI JALALUDIN ANSARI:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government's attention has been drawn to the alleged racket involving recruiting of handicapped children from certain parts of our country to beg in Mecca and Medina;

(b) if so, whether any inquiry has been conducted into this practice; and

(c) if so, the details and action taken to bring back such children and stop the practice which defame the image of the country?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI I.K. GUJRAL): (a) Yes, Sir, 130 children, most of them handicapped, were apprehended by the authorities of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia while begging in Jeddah and the holy cities of Mecca and Medina. The Saudi authorities did this as a part of an exercise to apprehend beggars, irrespective of their nationality during the month of Ramadan. These children were, subsequently, deported to India by the Saudi authorities;

(b) The Government of West Bengal has set up an investigation team under Criminal Investigation Department, West Bengal to conduct a detailed inquiry into the operation of these gangs.

(c) On being informed by Saudi authorities of the detention of children, the Consulate General of India issued necessary travel documents for their return to India. The deportation was done in two batches i.e. 77 children on January 13, 1997 (consisting of 76 girls and 1 boy) and 47 boys on February 3, 1997 making it a total of 124. Another 6 children, similarly apprehended, are awaiting deportation from Saudi Arabia.

The Government, while keeping in mind that inconvenience should not be caused to bonafide pilgrims going to Saudi Arabia for Haj or Umrah, has requested immigration authorities not to allow handicapped children to travel for pilgrimage unless accompanied by a parent. Separately, instructions have been issued to tighten procedures and adopt stricter measures to ensure that children travelling abroad are indeed accompanying their parents and not being taken by anyone else.

British Labour Party Statement on Kashmir

482. SHRI N. GIRI PRASAD:
SHRI JALALUDIN AN SARI:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government's attention has been drawn to the reported statement of British Labour Party in favour of plebiscite in Kashmir; and